CHILDREN + PARENTS + ARTS

Three 'Rs' for the Nineties

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FROM WORDS TO STORIES

These brochures are designed to show parents a host of practical ways to introduce their children —both in school and at home — to creative writing, theater, music, dance and visual art.

Educators tell us that these activities help children learn about the world and about themselves. Furthermore, learning a favorite skill or subject is the principal way that many children actually learn to read, write, reason and cipher.

Both culture and childhood deserve every adult American's attention and cooperative concern. This collection of brochures itself is the product of cooperation — by five private organizations that drafted the brochure texts and the National Endowment for the Arts. We are all indebted to the Hallmark Corporate Foundation whose generous support made the project possible and allowed us to help America's children experience the wonder and wit and wisdom of the arts.*

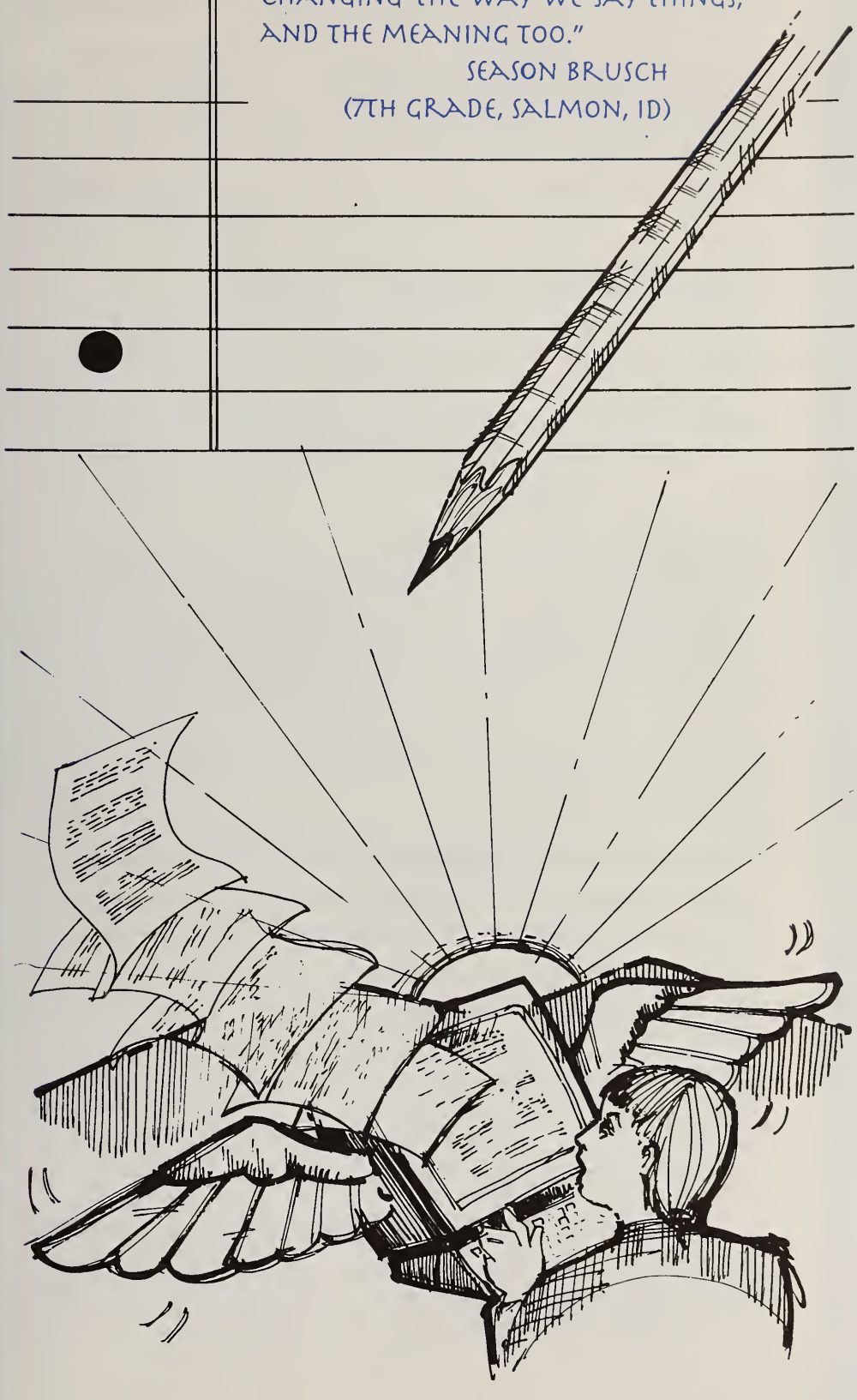
John E. Frohnmayer
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts

**American Alliance for Theatre & Education,*
Music Educators National Conference,
National Art Education Association,
National Dance Association,
Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

FROM WORDS TO STORIES

"LETTERS ARE LITTLE PEOPLE
WITH TINY BRAINS, THINKING OF
WHAT SOUND TO MAKE NEXT.
SOME REBEL AND REMAIN SILENT,
CHANGING THE WAY WE SAY THINGS,
AND THE MEANING TOO."

SEASON BRUSCH
(7TH GRADE, SALMON, ID)



All young children love to play with words. They love to make jokes and puns, sing songs, invent names and listen to and tell stories. It is a short step from loving such language play to loving writing.

You can help your child make that short but important step:

- Encourage your child's curiosity and imaginative play.
- Make reading an important part of your family life.
- Respect your child's interests in writing and reading.
- Suggest imaginative ways to write for school and for fun.

Preparing Your Child for Writing

Your family's attitudes and habits can make learning to write natural and fun for your child rather than hard and frustrating. You can lay a firm foundation for future writing by reading and telling stories to your child; by letting your child know that you, too, enjoy and learn from books; by respecting your child's curiosity and imagination.

Reading and listening to stories help make writing easier. Children who read or hear stories regularly develop a natural understanding of how sentences, ideas and narratives work, and so have a much easier time later when these skills are "taught" to them in school. Reading can also make your child more eager to write. Just as young sports fans long to go out onto the playing fields, so children who love reading want to make up their own stories and poems.

Here are three ways to prepare your child for writing:

1. Read aloud to your children, even when they are very little. When you read aloud, children get not only a good story but also a moment of intimacy with you that adds to their good feeling about books and writing. Also, the fact that you take the trouble to read shows that you respect the written word. Keep reading aloud even after children can read on their own. You can read more advanced books than your child is reading, or return to old favorites together. As children listen, they come to see that different kinds of writing have different effects on us.

2. Encourage children to read by taking them to the library. Give books as presents. Be patient. Don't worry if at first your child is interested only in comics. Children who enjoy reading simple books will move on to more mature ones.

3. Answer your children's questions and listen to their stories. If children think that you don't care about what they say, they will not feel confident about expressing themselves, aloud or on paper. Also, your explanations help them understand how to organize their own thoughts.

Writing with children helps them learn to organize their ideas and stories and to think of themselves as authors. Here are a few ways to have fun "writing" with children who can't yet write on their own.

"Tell me a story." Ask your child to tell you a story. Write it down as it is told. Don't worry if you are a slow writer. While waiting for you to finish copying a line, your child will be thinking about what happens next in the story. If your child loses track of the story, you can help by reading it back and by asking questions like: "So then what happened?" or "What about the bad pirate?" Be careful not to "steal" the story by making too many suggestions. Children might take your contributions as criticisms, and end up feeling as if they've failed.

The team story. This is a good party game. Ask your child and some friends to form a circle and take turns making up one big story together. If the children are shy, you can start it off. Keep going until everyone has had a turn or the story feels finished, then read it back with gusto. You'll be surprised by how much fun this is.

Playtime. Young children spend much of their free time pretending they are other people — superheroes, princesses, astronauts. Creating a play is a natural literary form for children. Have your child (perhaps with some friends) dictate a play or story to you. When it is finished, the children can act it out. Let them change the play as they act it out, if they wish.

"Publication." Just like adult authors, children write to entertain themselves, but they also like to have other people appreciate their work. There are many ways to "publish" your children's writing. You can put it up on a bulletin board or the refrigerator. You can type it, read it aloud, or photocopy it and give it to family, friends and teachers. You can also make a child's writing into little books (with illustrations by the author) and keep them on a special shelf.

It is perfectly all right to take dictation from your child even after they can write on their own. As long as children enjoy the experience, it is good for the development of their writing.

Writing for School

Much of your child's writing will be done at school. One way to help your child enjoy school writing is to take an interest in it. Give special praise for those compositions based on imaginative assignments — stories, poems, etc. — because these are the sort your child is most likely to want to try doing independently.

If a child enjoys writing in school, provide the time and space at home to continue writing and encourage imaginative experiments. If your child is bored by school writing assignments, try to find ways of making them more interesting. Say the assignment is to answer the question "What is love?" One way of answering is to be wacky: "Love is a school bus full of rutabagas." Another is to be honest: "I don't know what love is. Sometimes I hate the people I am supposed to love...." Remember, many teachers like surprising responses.

Writing at Home

Many children begin writing on their own at home simply because it is fun. For some this is a natural outgrowth of writing with their parents. Other children need encouragement.

The first thing you should do to encourage your child to write at home is provide the basics that all writers need, young or old:

- The tools of the trade: paper, pencils and pens; if possible a typewriter or computer.
- A place to write that is comfortable and quiet.
- Time enough not only to write but to look for inspiration by daydreaming and letting the imagination wander.

You can make writing special by allowing your child to use your desk, your typewriter or computer, or just your favorite pen. You can fold several sheets of typing paper in half, staple the folded edge, and say, "Here is an empty book, ready to be filled!"

Don't be pushy. Encouraging your child to write is a delicate matter. Many children react to pressure by becoming afraid of failure. Many children don't want to write because they're afraid of making spelling mistakes. Tell children that when they write poems and stories for themselves, they don't have to spell everything right. Only when children are ready to revise or publish their writing do they need to go over spelling, punctuation, etc. School homework is a required activity for children, but writing poems and stories at home ought to be voluntary— suggested only as a way of having fun. Children will write a lot if they enjoy it.

If your children already like to write at home, it is probably best not to meddle. Children will enjoy writing more if they feel that it is really their own. But if they ask for help, or you see that they are running out of inspiration, here are a few ideas you could try:

• **Riddles.** Ask your child to describe something without revealing what the thing is. Example: "I come from a land where everything is upside-down. I have a pocket but I don't wear clothes. I have four legs but I don't walk. What am I?" (*Answer: a kangaroo.*) Writing riddles improves children's ability to describe accurately.

• **Apologies.** Suggest that your child write a series of apologies for wild offenses. Example: "I'm sorry I told your mother that a pack of meat-eating butterflies had eaten your little sister, but I couldn't think of anything else to say and I didn't know she'd believe me." To make a surprising apology, your children will have to visualize a situation vividly.

• **Impossible day.** Suggest that your child write a story about a day when only impossible things happened. Example: "While my father was riding his crayon, a camel flew in and kissed my mother on the cheek." The more impossible, the better. The joy of this type of story is that it invites children to search their minds for startling words and combinations.

• **First sentences.** Help your child start a story by providing a first sentence that sets up a strange or intriguing situation. For example: "On Saturday morning I noticed a flower beginning to grow out of the center of my forehead." Or, "When we reached the mountaintop, we found a rope hanging from the sky." It takes creative and connected thinking to make an attractive story out of such ideas.

• **Photostories.** Suggest that children flip through a magazine until they find an interesting photograph. Then, have them write a story (without reading the caption or article) that describes what happened before, during and after the photograph was taken. This idea also works well with paintings and family photographs, particularly if they are of people or places the children have never known. Whatever the subject matter, the story will help your children think logically and creatively about events.

• **Dialogues.** Suggest that your child write a conversation between two related objects, like a pencil and paper, a fork and meat, their own feet and the sidewalk. How would it feel to be the floor? How would it feel to be feet? Creating dialogues helps children think about the ways objects or ideas are linked.

YOUR RESPONSE TO YOUR CHILD'S WRITING

Your response to your children's writing is all-important. If you are proud of what they have written at home or at school, they will also be proud and will want to do more. If you are indifferent or too critical, they will find writing much more difficult.

• First point out what you like in your child's writing. Praising children's strengths is a much more effective way of helping them to write well than pointing out weaknesses. You can always find something to praise. Be specific and honest. If you praise everything uniformly, your praise will lose its effect.

• Be very gentle with your criticisms, especially with beginning writers. Always introduce your concerns after some praise. Remember that your main purpose is not to turn the child into a Shakespeare, but to encourage the child to enjoy writing. As long as children keep writing, they will improve.

• Praise what is unique or unexpected in your child's work, even if it seems a bit out of place, for it is in such unconventional parts that children are often truest to their own way of seeing things. If children feel free to be "different," they are much more likely to value writing as a mode of genuine self-expression.

• Don't worry if your child wants to write only about super-heroes or puppies. A child who enjoys writing will inevitably move on to other topics.

Teachers & Writers Collaborative *was founded by a group of writers and educators in 1967 to send writers into schools and to publish and distribute materials about teaching writing. T&W writers work with children and teachers, giving them an understanding and appreciation of literary traditions and a sense of the methods and motives of writers. T&W houses the Center for Imaginative Writing, a resource library and meeting place. For more information write:*

Teachers and Writers Collaborative
5 Union Square West, New York, New York 10003

Stephen O'Connor and William Bryant Logan developed this brochure.

The National Endowment for the Arts, *an independent federal agency, was founded by Congress in 1965 to foster excellence in the arts throughout the United States, to help broaden the public's understanding of the arts and provide broader access to the nation's rich cultural resources. NEA's Arts in Education Program focuses on increasing and improving arts programs in the nation's schools. For more information write: Arts in Education, National Endowment for the Arts, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20506*

DANCE AND YOUR CHILD

Dance is essential to general education for boys and girls. Dance education beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout life benefits the body, mind and spirit.

"THE ARTS — AND DANCE IN PARTICULAR — TRANSMIT CULTURE, TEACH SKILLS AND FULFILL THE HUMAN SPIRIT. THERE IS PERHAPS NO BETTER DESCRIPTION OF EDUCATION THAN THIS."

CAROLYN ADAMS,
PROFESSIONAL DANCER

BENEFITS OF DANCE FOR CHILDREN

Dance education has many benefits:

• **Physical.** Dance helps to increase flexibility, improve circulation, tone the body and develop muscles. It also improves posture, balance and coordination.

• **Intellectual.** Dance enriches learning through a variety of perspectives, both traditional and experimental.

• **Esthetic.** Dance awakens consciousness of beauty, lending new meaning to movement and form.

• **Cultural.** Dance increases understanding and appreciation for forms, choices and rituals from a broad range of historical, social and cultural perspectives.

• **Emotional.** Dance helps develop self-confidence and self-esteem in a stimulating environment.

• **Social.** Dance improves sensitivity, understanding, appreciation and consideration for others, both for their similarities and differences.

Dance Engages the Whole Person

Although dance can be great exercise, it is primarily an art form and an esthetic expression of mind and body. Dance as an art form has three dimensions:

• **Learning.** Like other art forms, dance helps us to perceive and communicate who we are.

• **Knowledge.** Dance has its own body of knowledge which can be shared, passed on and enlarged.

• **Experience.** The very nature of dance is best discovered through experiencing it. In this it is almost unique as an art form, and very special as part of a child's education.

By combining these three dimensions, dance engages the whole person in simultaneously moving, thinking and feeling. Thus dance education can enhance your child's physical, mental and emotional development. This holds for boys and girls alike.

DANCE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

For young children, dance offers avenues for exploration, discovery and the development of natural instincts for movement. Dance activities offer many benefits for children, encouraging mental and emotional development as well as obviously enhancing motor skills.

Dancing gives the young child a chance to experience and understand both personal and social perspectives in a stimulating situation. Dancing offers opportunities to express thoughts and feelings and to understand other's thoughts and feelings.

The dynamic balance of dance's physical, mental and emotional aspects should be present in dance education, regardless of whether the child plans to pursue a career in dance. As in other arts disciplines, professional preparation in dance demands years of rigorous education, training and practice.

What you can do to get your child started in dance

As a parent, you can offer your child early exposure to the art of dance and movement through many activities:

- **Encourage your child to experience movement.** Ask questions like "How many ways can you balance yourself besides standing?" and "How many different ways can you move your head (arms, leg, upper body)?" Questions like these will help your child become aware of his body and its relationship to other people and the environment.

- **Provide a place and times for your child to explore and invent movement.** Have her tell a story by acting it out with body movements. Or, ask him to move with different types of walks (downhill, on parade, stiff, up stairs) or to pretend to use different kinds of vehicles (bicycle, skateboard, car, horse, etc.).

- **Encourage the child to relate movement to rhythm.** This can be as simple as getting a child to clap, rock or hop to music or a rhythmic beat. Your child may also enjoy moving or dancing to familiar songs and nursery rhymes. The goal is to get the child to experience movement as it relates to music or rhythm.

- **Allow the child to experiment with basic movements.** Walking, running, jumping, skipping and such are basic locomotor movements. Bending, stretching, twisting and swinging are non-locomotor movements. By varying the size, level and direction of these basics, children discover a large number of movements which can be combined to form basic dance steps.

Educators and teacher organizations increasingly recognize creative movement as integral to children's development, and there are a number of exemplary dance education programs in elementary schools. But unfortunately, well-balanced dance programs are not found consistently in our schools today. As a parent you can do two things to ensure good dance education for your child.

First, look into the situation in your school and school district. Find what importance is given to dance and advocate making it a high priority. Second, look into private instruction in studios, community centers, parks and recreation programs, summer camps and other enterprises such as YWCAs.

In both cases, assure yourself that a dance program is appropriate for your child's physical and social development and that it is educationally sound. The following information may help you review the dance instruction in your local school, private studio or other setting.

Evaluating Teachers and Classes

Ask the following questions about the teacher(s) who might instruct your child. In an ideal situation all the answers will be yes:

- Can I observe the class before enrolling my child?
- Does the teacher seem aware of the physical, emotional and social development and needs of the students?
- Does the teacher seem enthusiastic about the work?
- Is the teacher supportive of each student's abilities, potential and goals?
- Does the teacher use imaginative, varied and interesting approaches to the material being taught?
- Is the teacher well trained and qualified?
- Does the teacher seem well prepared and able to effectively communicate his or her knowledge?
- Is the teacher familiar with human anatomy and the proper use of the body?

In the same spirit, ask these questions about the classes:

- Are the students grouped according to age, physical abilities and social development?
- Are class and time allotments appropriate for the age group?

- Does the teacher give time for movement exploration?
- Does the class provide satisfaction and enjoyment?
- Is required attire appropriate and comfortable?

The following class sizes and durations are suggested:

Ages 3-5	7-15 students	30-45 minutes
Ages 6-8	20 students	45-60 minutes
Ages 9-12	25 students	60-90 minutes

Facilities

A good place for dance classes offers the following:

- A space that is clean, well ventilated, well lit and free of obstructions.
- A floor that is resilient and well maintained. (A suspended wood floor is best to avoid physical stress, but certain treatments over cement and tile can accommodate dance that does not include a great deal of landing from jumps.)
- Floor space that is adequate for the class size and the age of the participants, ideally 100 square feet per student.
- Adequate space for changing clothes.
- Access to drinking water and restrooms.

Other Considerations

- Dance class should not over-stress the body.
- Major portions of the class should not be devoted to performances or preparing for recitals.
- Dance for children should concentrate on individualization, creativity and movement exploration.
- Formal instruction in specific dance forms should not begin before age 7 or 8 depending on the development of the child and previous experience.
- Pointe work (ballet dancing on "toe") should not begin before there is well-developed body coordination, adequate strength, proper skeletal alignment and working body placement. Special attention must be given to the development of the feet, legs and back. Very few children should start pointe work before age 11.

ADDITIONAL READING

For more information, you may want to consult the following books:

Jacob, Ellen. (1981). *Dancing: A Guide to the Dancer You Can Be.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

Loren, Teri. (1978). *Dancer's Companion.* New York: The Dial Press.

These pamphlets may be purchased from the National Dance Association:

DANCE: A Career for You

Dance Curricula Guidelines K-12

Dance Education - What Is It? Why Is It Important?

Guide to Creative Dance for the Young Child

Dance Scholarship Directory

Dance Resource Guide

Stinson, Susan. *Dance for the Young Child.*

Children's Dance.

The National Dance Association *represents practitioners of every aspect of dance and dance education in the United States and abroad. Through publications, symposia, workshops and resource papers, NDA promotes quality dance and dance education for all levels, populations, ages and cultures.*

National Dance Association
1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1502
Tel: 703/476-3436 Fax: 703/476-9527

The National Endowment for the Arts, *an independent federal agency, was founded by Congress in 1965 to foster excellence in the arts throughout the United States, to help broaden the public's understanding of the arts and provide broader access to the nation's rich cultural resources. NEA's Arts in Education Program focuses on increasing and improving arts programs in the nation's schools. For more information write: Arts in Education, National Endowment for the Arts, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20506*

YOUR CHILD AND THE VISUAL ARTS

The visual arts interpret and reflect life. Through studying art, children gain valuable insights about the world along with knowledge and skills they can use throughout their lives.

THE SCOPE OF LEARNING

Art education — appreciation courses, hands-on art classes, museum visits and parent-assisted activities — helps children develop their own creative skills and understand the artistic work of others. By encouraging visual arts education, you will help your children to:

- respond to what they see in art and in the world around them;
- perceive and grasp relationships in their environment;
- think creatively while developing skills in drawing, painting, sculpting, designing, crafting, etc;
- gain manipulative and organizing skills through their own creative work;
- learn about humankind's vast cultural heritage;
- understand the nature of art and the creative process;
- make informed esthetic judgments about art.

To educate children, parents along with teachers and museum professionals must keep in mind each student's interests as well as his intellectual, social and esthetic maturity. The instruction should be interesting in order to stimulate intellectual growth. Not all activities should get the same emphasis at each age or for each student. Find opportunities that allow your child to:

- Take close looks at both natural and cultural objects of many kinds.
- Find outlets for expressing perceptions and feelings through a variety of art forms suited to the child's abilities and preferences.
- Experiment with different materials and methods in order to understand their different properties.
- Evaluate and review the child's work so that the youngster gains understanding of formal structure and the potential for developing line, form, color, shape and texture.
- Read about, look at, and discuss works of art from other past and modern cultures; to do this, use different educational, media and community resources.
- Evaluate the child's works of art as well as those of artists past and present.
- See artists and designers at work in classroom and museum demonstrations, on film and video.
- Engage in arts activities — museum visits, tours of art schools, participation in art classes — to apply new knowledge the child has gained.

You, Your Child and the Visual Arts

Here are activities you can use to introduce your child to the world of art. Remember that your own attitudes make strong impressions on your child. A sense of openness to the visual arts of diverse cultures, along with a willingness to ask questions about art, are as important for you as for the child.

At Home and About Town

"Seeing" versus looking is something you can encourage every day. Teach your child to see colors, shapes and textures in the world at large. Help your child recognize and understand the signs and symbols that abound in our lives. Make a game out of identifying elements of art as you ride in the car or take family walks. You will discover art all around: in local architecture, monuments, billboards, a park's design, the patterns of streets and signs as well as in traditional arts and crafts.

Encourage your child to react to visual stimuli — colors, shapes, sizes, textures and materials — found in art dealing with a wide range of situations and subjects. Some will be more engaging than others. Children generally prefer bright colors, realism and familiar subject matter.

To help get children involved:

- Find a wall at home that your children can use to display reproductions or original art that they have created. Or set up an exhibition in an "art corner."
- Provide a space in which your child can explore different media such as paints, crayons and clay. (Pick an easy-to-clean space and dress in washables.)
- Make available various two- and three-dimensional materials: paper to cut-and-paste, blocks to build.
- Ask the art teacher at school about appropriate materials for your child at different development levels.

To keep interest alive:

• Encourage and compliment your child's creative efforts. Ask the youngster to tell you about the art. Do NOT say what you think is "wrong" with it or how you think it should be done.

• Remind yourself that complex and fine motor skills take time to develop. Offer experiences that strengthen skills already learned. Provide materials and tools that broaden the range of creativity.

• Remember that many children paint and draw for no other reason than the pleasure it gives them. These activities can be easily fostered.

At the Museum, Gallery or Arts Center

Planned in advance, a visit to a local art center, gallery or museum can be rewarding, exciting and stimulating for both parent and child. Your state arts agency or local council can provide information about art exhibitions — where they are, and what there is to see. Ask about programs designed for children and about parent-and-child events.

Take time to plan your visit so that it meets your child's physical and learning needs. Identify in advance the exhibit areas and art works you wish to see. Learn where benches, restrooms and cafeterias are located.

Don't overwhelm or tire children by overdoing it. If you are visiting a large museum, stay in two or three galleries, depending on the child's age and abilities. A number of short visits are better than a long one that is overwhelming.

By listening carefully to your child before planning a trip, you will learn what things he or she is most interested in seeing. Remember to meet a child's physical need for movement and change while engaged in "seeing and appreciating." If a child expresses interest in a work of art you did not select, spend time with it. Children may get frustrated at having to view art selected for them, rather than what they choose for themselves.

Younger children have both a shorter attention span and lower level of retention. For the very young, pictures and drawings in books can spark interest in the visual arts and you can build from there. It is a good idea to have children view works of art on several occasions. They will remember some vividly, while a second visit and talking about the works will reinforce first impressions.

Also, it is good to encourage children to respond to pictures, sculptures and crafts in their own way. Resist the urge to tell them what they should see, feel or think. After a first experience, you can discuss the art, listening to the child's interpretation. Then share information you have about the work, the artist who made it, and how it was achieved. The facts you want to share should be appealing and easy to understand.

A Word of Warning: At the first sign of boredom, fatigue or disinterest, take a rest or quit for the day!

More suggestions for making the arts enjoyable:

• Museum shops sell postcards, posters of art works and books about art and artists written especially for children. Your child may want to buy a book or reproduction of a particular favorite.

• Emphasize what the child understands and learns. Make connections with what he already knows. Ask what she is studying in school that relates to pictures you saw. Tie your "seeing" experiences into those subjects.

Special Art Classes

To get professional arts training for your child, check with your school's art teacher, or with your local or state arts agency for the names of qualified instructors and schools.

ADDITIONAL READING

For more information about how to offer your child learning opportunities in art, consult the following pamphlets and books:

Purposes, Principles, and Standards for School Art Programs. National Art Education Association, 1916 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091.

Beyond Creating: The Place for Art in America's Schools. J. Paul Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 401 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 950, Santa Monica, CA 90401

The Role of Imagery in Learning by Harry S. Broudy. Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Art Education and Human Development by Howard Gardner. Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Looking at Paintings by Susan Woodford, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Art Appreciation for the Popsicle Generation by Lauann Brown, Good Apple, Inc. 1948.

Children and Their Art by Charles D. Gaitskill and Al Hurwitz, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1982.

Emphasis Art: A Qualitative Art Program for Elementary and Middle Schools by Frank Wachowiak, Harper and Row, 1985.

Creative and Mental Growth by Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, Macmillan, 1987.

The National Art Education Association, *founded in 1947, is the largest professional art education association in the world. Members include elementary and secondary teachers, artists, administrators, museum educators, art council staff members and university professors throughout the United States and 66 foreign countries. NAEA's mission is to advance art education through professional development, service, advancement of knowledge and leadership. For information write:* ***NAEA,*** *1916 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091*

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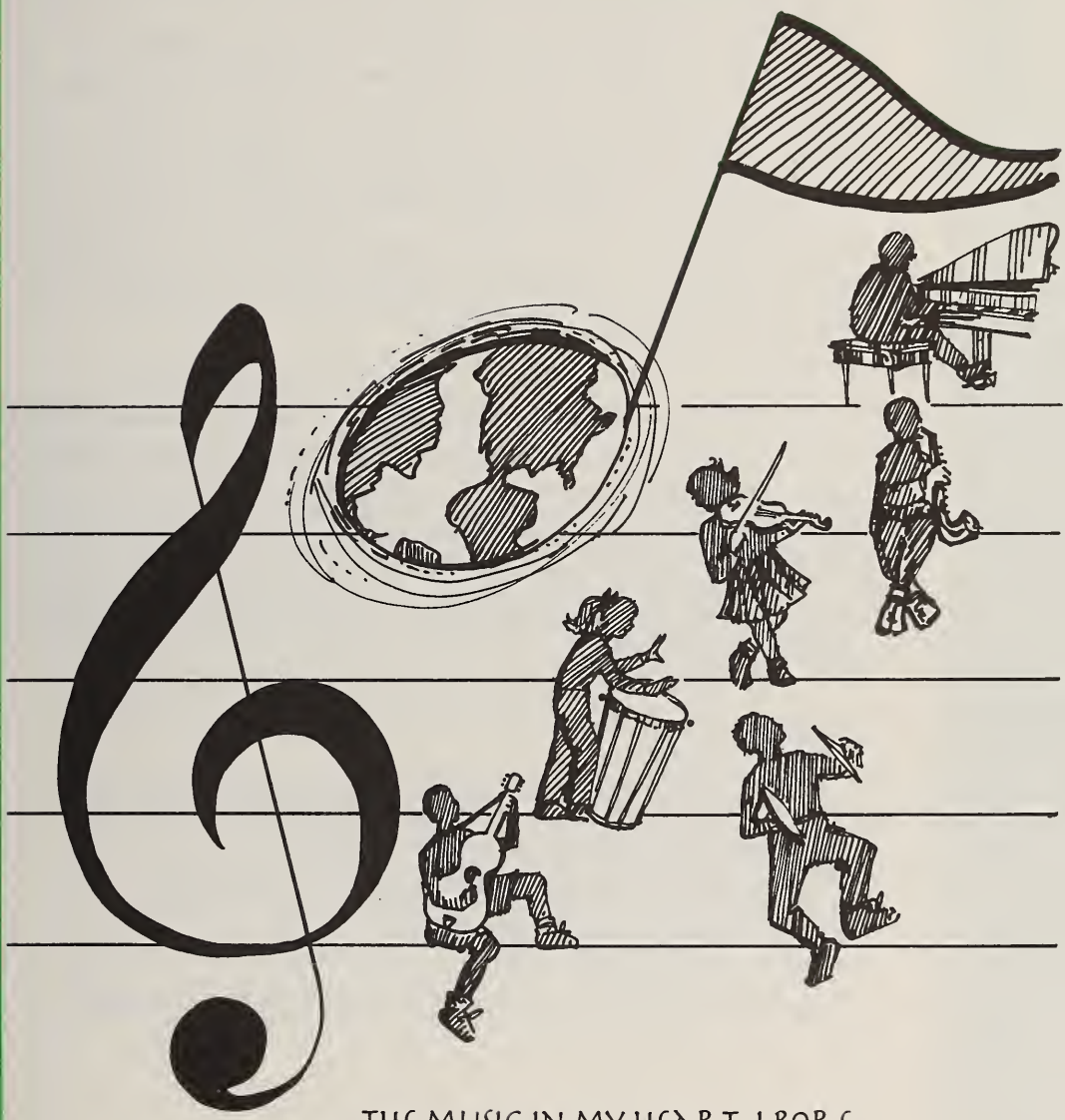
MUSIC AND YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

Why should your child study music? From elementary school onwards, music study helps children acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that influence them throughout their lives.
In addition to learning music for its own sake, children who participate in music learn coordination, goal-setting, concentration and cooperation.

THE MUSIC IN MY HEART I BORE,
LONG AFTER IT WAS HEARD NO MORE.
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

As a parent, you can encourage your child's love of music and nurture his or her musical talents in a number of ways: By listening to good music programs and recordings together, by attending musical events and making music as a family, by praising children for their musical activities and accomplishments. As a result of music-listening and music-making experiences, elementary school children can become better listeners and develop musical intelligence. They also develop pride and a sense of accomplishment as young musicians.

Suggested Activities

Listening to music, moving to music and playing musical games are best for small children and good for elementary students as well. By ages five to eight, many children are ready for one-on-one music lessons. You can help your child choose an instrument by consulting the school music teacher and by noticing what sounds your child most enjoys while listening to music. If you decide to supplement lessons offered at the school with private lessons, you can find a good teacher by asking the school music teacher or the music faculty at a local university for recommendations.

Group classes are particularly supportive for young children. In the early stages, a parent should be in the room with the child during at-home practice periods to offer encouragement and praise and to request specific songs ("That was really good! Would you play it again for me?") It is impossible to give any child too much encouragement. Success at music-making bolsters self-esteem.

When To Start

- Children can begin piano lessons whenever they can sit on a piano bench and concentrate.
- Stringed-instrument study can begin very early (if scaled-down instruments are used) — preferably by grade four.
- Study on wind instruments should begin by grade five.

You can invest in your child's future by ensuring that your school has good music programs, taught by certified music specialists in general music, instrumental music and choral instruction from pre-kindergarten through high school.

What to Look For in Elementary School

- Opportunities for all students: to sing, move to music, and learn to play classroom instruments; to develop skills in performing, reading, creating, listening to and describing music; to learn to use music vocabulary and read and write music notation; to develop enjoyment of and sensitivities to music; to explore music from a variety of cultures.
- Opportunities for students to participate in both choral and instrumental music starting in grade four.
- Special experiences for gifted and handicapped students.
- Instruction by certified music educators supplemented by classroom teachers.
- Adequate textbooks, printed music, instruments, equipment, recordings and other music materials.
- Music rooms that have adequate space, ventilation and light as well as access to a good piano, risers, audiovisual equipment and a good sound system.

Students in grades one through three should learn to enjoy and explore music. By the end of grade three, students should realize that music is an important part of everyday life and be able to perform and create it. They should be able to use music as a means of individual expression and to listen to the creations of other people with respect, curiosity and pleasure.

Students in grades four through six should build on the skills they developed earlier. By the end of grade six, they should be able to participate in music activities by singing and playing instruments. They should enjoy listening to most types of music, and be able to describe musical works and discuss their personal responses to them.

At every age, your child should have regular opportunities to:

- hear, sing or play music with and for family and friends in a relaxed setting.
- take part in community music events that relate directly to the child's own culture and that involve distinctly different cultures.
- join you in watching music and arts programs on television. (To make the most of these experiences, ask your child questions about the program afterward — not during the performance.)

How to Make Your Child's Life Musical

- Encourage your child to participate in general music classes and performing ensembles.
- When school offers band or string instrument instruction, help your child choose an instrument.
- Visit the classroom to gain a better understanding of what takes place in the music program.
- Volunteer to chaperon trips to music events and work to bring outstanding performers to your child's school.
- Attend concerts with your child.
- Help with home practice and set scheduled practice times. Set up a well-lit, quiet practice area free from distractions. Ask your child to play for you and others, and give sincere and frequent praise. Do not be overly critical; the music teacher will correct problems. Listen and show enthusiasm for your child's efforts and achievements.

ADDITIONAL READING

The following publications provide more detailed information.

Growing Up Complete: The Imperative for Music Education. Report of the National Commission on Music Education, 1991. $7.95

Action Kit for Music Education. This includes two books including *Building Support for School Music,* two videotapes; and four brochures to help conduct a local advocacy campaign. 1991. $37.50.

The School Music Program: Description and Standards. Guidelines for music curricula, K to 12. $10.50.

Music in Today's Schools: Rationale and Commentary. A concise explanation of why music is important in every child's education. $4.00.

Guidelines for Performances of School Music Groups: Expectations and Limitations. $7.50.

These publications are available from:

Music Educators National Conference
1902 Association Drive
Reston, Virginia 22091

The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) *is the only national association that addresses all aspects of music education: band, chorus, orchestra, general music, teacher education and research. More than 60,000 members represent all levels of teaching from pre-kindergarten to postdoctoral levels. Since 1907, MENC has worked to ensure that every student has access to a well-balanced and comprehensive school music program.*

The National Endowment for the Arts, *an independent federal agency, was founded by Congress in 1965 to foster excellence in the arts throughout the United States, to help broaden the public's understanding of the arts and provide broader access to the nation's rich cultural resources. NEA's Arts in Education Program focuses on increasing and improving arts programs in the nation's schools. For more information write: Arts in Education, National Endowment for the Arts, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20506*

THE THEATER AND CHILDREN

Children of all ages love to pretend, to enter worlds of the imagination. As toddlers, they mimic things they see in everyday life. By elementary school age, they act out stories, creating original plots or adapting fairy tales and real-life events. By middle school they're ready for more formal play-acting: going on stage to present prepared scripts, whether scenes from the classics or their own inventions. In other words, each stage of childhood has its own forms of drama, and all these forms help children grow and learn.

"DRAMATIC PLAY" AND "CREATIVE DRAMA"

Children enter the world of make-believe first as toddlers when they discover the soul of theater by engaging in activities they see around them and by putting themselves in the places of others. This activity involves mind, body and imagination. It is *dramatic play*, what one educator calls "rehearsal for life." An extension of ordinary play, creative play—the root of theater—is essential to a child's full development.

As children grow older, their play develops structure. They act out favorite stories, create original situations from life experiences, and imagine themselves in fantasy worlds where anything is possible. If they are encouraged in this kind of play at home, they become ready for *creative drama* by the time they enter primary school. As essential as dramatic play is to a child's healthy development, creative drama is an art form, a socializing activity and a means of learning. At this point, guidance by an experienced teacher or leader is needed, someone to guide the drama, to help the young players deepen their experiences and express themselves more effectively.

Creative drama is not acting as adults think of it. It requires no script or memorized lines. It is improvised and centers on children as the participants. Older children often want to extend the process and present their work for an audience. This is fine, so long as the desire to "go public" comes from them, for it is the process rather than the product that is important for youngsters.

In middle school or junior high, many children become ready for what most people think of as the "theater arts" which involve a stage, actors and a play. This implies theater's formal elements: acting, directing, scene and costume design, as well as technical concerns such as stage management, set building, lighting, publicity, etc.

Besides creating theater in its many forms, children also benefit from seeing it. *Children's theater*, comprising an ever-growing diversity of companies and scripts, is an excellent introduction to lifelong enjoyment of theater.

For young children the theater arts are best used informally and playfully. This offers pre-kindergarten and elementary-age children opportunities to make theater that is a natural extension of their physical, intellectual and emotional lives. Creative drama builds on the universal human desire to understand our world by imitating and reenacting it.

As a parent, you can help your child enjoy dramatic play, even if you have had no theater background or experience. First of all,

you can *encourage your child to play*. Enter into the game, taking cues as to your role. For example, your daughter may want you to be a storekeeper or a customer, a doctor or a patient, a bus driver or passenger, depending on which character she wants to be. Provide a place for creative drama. This could be a corner of the child's room where toys are kept. "Props" can be simple and commonplace. For instance, a scarf can become a shawl, a sash or any number of things. Hats can denote different characters. Baskets, bags and plastic dishes are all useful props.

Dramatic play need not be confined to one space, for it is spontaneous and the impulse to enact a character or imitate an action is rarely planned in advance. Chances are it will be brief and fragmentary, although as children grow older the game becomes longer and more detailed. Favorite stories and activities are often repeated, but even with repetition new ideas are constantly generated, thus fostering continued imaginative growth for the children.

Read aloud and tell stories. Good literature suggests many possibilities and discourages a tendency to imitate situations seen on television. However, many ideas may come from real life issues, even for very young children.

Finally, enjoy these spontaneous moments. Remember that they are the child's first engagement with an art form and can lead to lifelong pleasure. You are not encouraging a career in the theater; you are helping in the development of a human being through this most human of the arts, the theater.

What Does Creative Drama Offer to Young Children?

Creative drama provides many benefits, among them:

- Development of imagination and esthetic awareness
- Independent and critical thinking
- Social growth and the ability to work with others
- Improved communication skills
- Healthy release of emotion
- Knowledge of self
- Fun and recreation
- An introduction to the theater

What Do You, as a Parent, Get Out of It?

Creative drama offers benefits for parents too:

- Quality time spent with your young child in creative moments.
- Valuable insights into the observations, impressions, interests, fears and humor that your child reveals.
- Fun! You can *both* enjoy dramatic play for the pure fun of it.

FINDING CREATIVE RESOURCES

Because creative drama is a group activity requiring skilled leadership, you should check with your child's teacher or principal to see whether it is already part of the school program. It may be that you will want to look further to find opportunities in your community for classes in the performing arts. While many schools are now adding theater to the curriculum, unfortunately it is absent in most elementary schools. Therefore, you should look for available resources in the following places:

- Community centers and city and county recreation departments.
- Libraries, museums, churches, playgrounds and camps, YMCAs and YWCAs.
- Local colleges and universities for year-round or summer classes for children.
- Performing arts centers, professional and community theaters.

Many facilities have splendid programs in the arts. Visit classes, check the age levels of the children and the preparation of the teachers. Classes in creative drama, puppetry, mime and dance offer enrichment beyond whatever the school provides. Again, for the young child, the chance to explore creatively and act spontaneously is more valuable than pressured situations involving either a performance for an audience or a predetermined product.

While creative drama involves children as active participants, children's theater engages them as audience. Plays range from entertainment for the primary grades to more mature material designed for junior high school. Many adult plays can be enjoyed by older teenagers and (depending on the subject matter and the style of the production) by younger audiences as well.

Children's theater companies should be checked carefully before taking a child to a performance or engaging a company for a school assembly. Many plays are over-simplified for the very young, with occasional lines aimed at the adults in the audience; this is a condescending practice and children are quick to perceive it. Some good sources of information about children's theater companies are: theater departments of colleges and universities; newspaper reviews, if available; local or state arts councils; the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE). In addition, many regional arts agencies support touring theaters for children and young audiences. Your state arts council can put you in touch with the regional organization for your area.

BENEFITS OF ATTENDING THE THEATER

Going to the theater has many benefits for children, among them:

- Appreciation of theater as an esthetic experience.
- Increased awareness of social and cultural values.
- Sharing in a communal art form.
- Increased knowledge of history and human events.

Elements of a Good Production

By attending children's theater regularly, both parent and child gain personal likes and dislikes and can grasp what is an excellent production as opposed to one that is poor or merely competent. If you have not attended children's theater regularly, here are some elements that characterize a good production, along with some questions concerning each element. Not every criterion will apply to every production.

• **A Good Story:** Children's theater today is wide-ranging, offering plays from traditional fairy tales to homelessness and drug abuse. Whatever the topic, a good production will clarify its subject. Did you learn something new or gain a new insight through the play?

• **Credible Characters:** A "willing suspension of disbelief" is necessary for viewing theater, but the characters should be believable. Did actions seem totally out-of-character for someone in the play? If so, did you lose interest in the action?

• **Excellent Performance Skills** (acting, dance, music, and any other skills called for such as juggling, fencing, etc.): Do the skills support the believability of the characters? Are they at a level befitting the expectations of the actors, both in terms of the amateur or professional status of the company and the actions of the characters?

• **Effective Visual Elements**: Do scenery, costumes, and lighting help transport you to the place and time of the play? Are they visually appealing? In cases where scenery and lighting are minimal or absent, did the production stimulate your imagination in other effective ways?

• **Challenging Ideas:** A good script can provoke thought, bring new ideas to light, perhaps help you look at a facet of life in a new or different way. Ask your child what he or she got from a performance. Try open-ended questions such as: What did you see on the stage? What was a particular character trying to do? What happened at the very beginning? The discussion you are likely to have may surprise you.

• **Insight into Other Cultures:** Theater can take us in time and place to other communities and cultures. Did the production help you to learn about cultural or ethnic traditions? If the play was in the present time, were there characters of culturally diverse backgrounds reflecting contemporary society?

• **Strong Emotional Response and Involvement in the Plot:** Were you moved by the action of the play? Tears or laughter are sure signs that the playwright and actors reached you. While emotions can't always be verbalized, a discussion with your child about his or her feelings about what happened can benefit both of you.

Children's theater includes a wide range of subject matter: folk and fairy tales; contemporary social issues, adventure stories; historical and biographical dramas. The form may be the straight dramatic play, the musical, documentary, or movement theater. In every case, however, the story line or theme should be clear and honestly presented and the production should be enjoyable.

The American Alliance for Theatre & Education: *Artists & Educators Serving Young People, a professional organization, promotes the highest standards of excellence in drama and theater education for children and youth. We provide the theater educator and theater artist with a network of resources and support, a base for advocacy, and programs and projects that focus on the importance of drama in the human experience. For more information, contact:*

American Alliance for Theatre & Education
Department of Theatre
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287

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These brochures are designed to show parents a host of practical ways to introduce their children —both in school and at home — to creative writing, theater, music, dance and visual art.

Educators tell us that these activities help children learn about the world and about themselves. Furthermore, learning a favorite skill or subject is the principal way that many children actually learn to read, write, reason and cipher.

Both culture and childhood deserve every adult American's attention and cooperative concern. This collection of brochures itself is the product of cooperation — by five private organizations that drafted the brochure texts and the National Endowment for the Arts. We are all indebted to the Hallmark Corporate Foundation whose generous support made the project possible and allowed us to help America's children experience the wonder and wit and wisdom of the arts.*

John E. Frohnmayer
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts

**American Alliance for Theatre & Education,*
Music Educators National Conference,
National Art Education Association,
National Dance Association,
Teachers & Writers Collaborative.